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EARLY PRINTING  
IN BARBADOS

BY DOUGLAS C. McMURTRIE

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# EARLY PRINTING IN BARBADOS

*Being an account of the Establishment of the Press  
on that Island and of the known work of David Harry,  
Samuel Keimer, William Beeby, William Brown, G.  
Esmand, John Orderson, Thomas W. Perch, Isaac  
W. Orderson, and W. Walker.*

BY DOUGLAS C. McMURTRIE

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## EARLY PRINTING IN BARBADOS

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THE island of Barbados, one of the Lesser Antilles and the easternmost of the West Indies, was first visited by a British ship in 1605. At that time possession of the island was taken in the name of James I, but no settlement was made there until 1625. In 1628, Charles Wolferstone was appointed governor. From the beginning, Barbados has been a crown colony of Great Britain.

During the seventeenth century there was no printing press on the island, as we know from two circumstances. In 1678 the Lords of Trade and Plantations complained to the governor that there was no press there for printing the laws of the island; and in 1696, upon the passage of a bill concerning privateers, the Barbados assembly prayed that the act might be sent to New England to be printed.

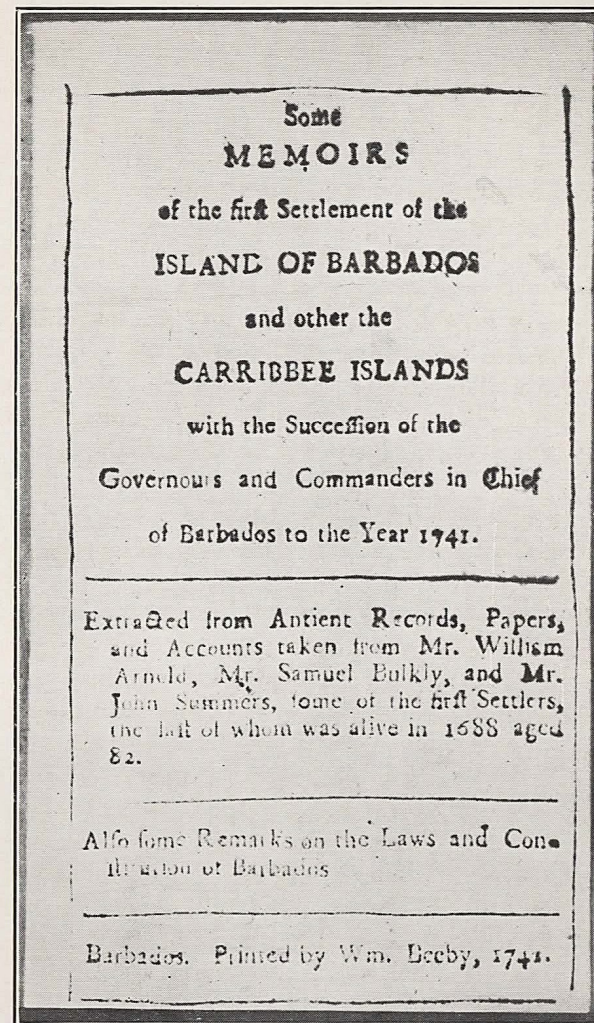
In fact, it was more than one hundred years after the first settlement of the island that printing was introduced there. About 1730, as Benjamin Franklin tells us in his *Memoirs*, a young printer named David Harry brought press and types from Philadelphia, and began to operate a printing office at Bridgetown, the capital and principal town of Barbados. Harry, a native of Pennsylvania, had served as an apprentice under Samuel Keimer at Philadelphia. On completing his apprenticeship in the summer of 1729, the young man prevailed upon Keimer to sell the



business to him. Keimer shortly afterwards departed for Barbados, but not, apparently, as a printer.

In 1730, David Harry decided to leave Philadelphia and followed Keimer to the West Indian island. As owner of the equipment, the ex-apprentice now became the master, with his former master in the craft in his employment as a journeyman. As soon as the printing office was set up at Bridgetown, Harry was commissioned to print the minutes of the Barbados assembly. But from all accounts of him, the young man was distinguished more for conviviality than for industry. Isaiah Thomas, in his *History of Printing in America*, says of Harry that he came from a well-to-do family, a condition which may account for the fact that he seemed to feel no compulsion to diligence in business. After a few months in Bridgetown he was so deeply involved in debt that he was willing to sell the printing plant back to Keimer. Keimer, himself an erratic and improvident person, somehow managed to find financial backing for the purchase, and Harry went back to Pennsylvania, "to follow husbandry," as Thomas tells us.

There is no scrap of printed matter extant that I know of to testify to David Harry's operation of a press at Bridgetown. And Samuel Keimer's work there as a printer is also unknown until some time in the early part of 1732, when he began the publication of the *Barbados Gazette*. The earliest surviving issue of this newspaper known to me is No. 120, "From Saturday April the 14th, to Wednesday April the 18th, 1733," which is preserved in the New York Public Library. The front page of this issue is here reproduced, in considerable reduction. This particular issue was a half-sheet, two pages, and carried as its colophon the line, "Sold by S. Keimer, in Meeting-House Yard."





THE  
BARBADOS-GAZETTE &c.  
NUMB. CXX.

From Saturday April the 14th, to Wednesday April the 18th, 1733.

**BARBADOS.**

**A**T a Meeting of His  
EXCELLENCY in  
Council at *Pilgrim* on *Tues-*  
*day* the 17th Day of *April*,  
1733 being the Day in Course.

PRESENT,  
His EXCELLENCY the Right Ho-  
NOURABLE the Lord Viscount  
HOWE.

The HONOURABLE

*James Dutton,*

*William Terrell,*

*Ralph Weekes,*

*John Fere,*

*Joseph Pilgrim,*

*William Leslie,*

*Thomas Maxwell,*

*John Able,*

*Obadiah Baggar,* and

*Thomas Applebaitte*

Esqrs,

Then His EXCELLENCY was  
pleased to order the Assembly to be cal-  
led in, and made the following Speech to  
the Council and said Assembly, *viz.*

*Gentlemen,*

**W**HEN His Majesty did me the  
Honour to appoint me Gover-  
nour of this Island, I was in Hopes I  
should have been able to have attended  
the Service of it immediately, but the set-  
tling my Affairs took up a much great-  
er Time than I expected which was  
the Reason I had not the Satisfaction  
of seeing you sooner; but even during  
that Delay, I endeavour'd to make my  
self as useful to you as I cou'd, by re-  
presenting the many Hardships and Dis-  
advantages the Trade of this Island now  
labours under, and by soliciting for  
a speedy Redress: How fortunate I  
may have been in my earnest Endeav-  
ours for obtaining it, I can't say. Could  
the Success be equal to the Desire I  
have of serving you, you wou'd soon

have all your Expectations answer'd,  
and all your Wishes granted: But since  
with Pleasure I can assure you, several  
Resolutions have already been agreed to  
in your Favour, and I do not in the  
least doubt, from the known Goodness  
of our most gracious King, and from the  
Assistance you may expect from the  
Justice of the British Parliament, you  
will have a considerable Relief in a  
very short Time.

*Gentlemen of the Assembly,*

**A**ltho' it may have been a Custom  
for some Governours upon their  
first coming to call a New Assembly,  
the Confidence I have in your Wisdom  
and Care for the Publick Good, and  
the Desire I have that the necessary Bu-  
siness of this Island shou'd have all ma-  
ginable Dispatch, determin'd me not  
to follow their Example, but call you  
together the first Opportunity, I am  
sure this Island will find the Good  
Effects of it I shou'd upon the Day to  
which you stood advis'd, it being the  
most agreeable to me because I thought  
it would be the most convenient to you.  
I have Orders from His MAJESTY  
to lay before you several Instructions  
relating to the Honour, Security and  
Advantage of this Island: All these at  
proper Times shall be communicated to  
you.

I have also receiv'd an Additional In-  
struction relating to me, and the Support  
of the Dignity of this Government, but  
being unwilling to enlarge upon an Af-  
fair which in so great a Measure, re-  
lates to my self, and relying wholly upon  
you, you shall now have a Copy of it.  
I believe you will all agree that the  
present State of the Fortifications of this  
Island requires your utmost Attention;  
your own Security depending so much  
upon their being put and kept in good  
Repair, I need not make Use of any  
Arguments to enforce the Necessity of it.

*Gentlemen of the Council, and Gentlemen  
of the Assembly,*

**I** Have nothing more at Heart than the  
Prosperity of this Island; my Inche-  
nations,



The "news" in the *Barbados Gazette* of April 18, 1733, consisted mainly of the speech of "His Excellency the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Howe" on assuming the office of Governor at a meeting of the Council on April 17th (which speech was ordered to "be entered in the Council Books, and also forthwith printed"). This was followed by "His Majesty's most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament on Tuesday the 16th Day of January, 1732/3." After His Majesty's speech was printed a paragraph which, as shedding some light upon the character of the printer, is here quoted:

"By private Letter from *Philadelphia*, we have Advice, that they have had a very sickly time of it there, that Three or Four and Twenty lay dead in a Day, which was a great many at one Time for that little City. Which if true, was no more than was long expected, and foretold in a very awful Manner, for their crying Sins of Hypocrisy, Oppression, wronging the Widow and Fatherless, Deism and open Profaness (*sic*), even to that Degree, that an Honourable Member of Council, who is a stiff *Quaker*, was pleas'd to say, in a Publick Market-Place just before your Printer's Departure, (in Fair-Time) *Samuel, I think Philadelphia is like Hell broke loose; tho' by the Way* there are many sincere hearted Souls that secretly bewail the gross Abominations wink'd at and cherish'd by some there who bear down all before 'em."

At the very end, after the *Philadelphia* paragraph and in small italic type, the printer pays his respects to a "former Correspondent, subscrib'd Marcia," whose last letter contained "several Threats against the Back and Pocket of the Printer." The printer hopes that "she will (if a well bred Gentlewoman) give her Betters Leave to be serv'd before her."

The *Barbados Gazette* began as a semi-weekly and was



reputed by Isaiah Thomas to have been the first newspaper published twice a week for any considerable period in any part of America. Eventually, however, it became a weekly. Keimer continued it until the latter part of 1738. He died in 1742 and his remains were interred in St. Michael's burying ground in Bridgetown on August 20th of that year. He was not highly successful as a printer and seems to have had a hard time of it in Barbados, as he had had at other places earlier in his career. Like many another printer before his time and after it, he had difficulty in making collections of money due him. His repressed emotions burst forth in the *Gazette* of May 4, 1734, in which he published "The Sorrowful Lamentation of Samuel Keimer, Printer of the Barbados Gazette," addressed to "Those wou'd-be thought gentlemen, who have long taken his paper, and never paid for it, and seem never to design to pay for it." The 34 verses of this "lamentation" are perhaps lacking in distinction as poetry, but they have found a place in Thomas's *History of Printing* because of the testimony contained therein as to the government subsidies accorded printers in Pennsylvania, New York, Virginia, Maryland, South Carolina, and even in Jamaica.

But alas your poor *Typo* prints no Figure;—like *Nullo*,  
Curs'd, cheated, abus'd by each pitiful Fellow.

Tho' working like Slave, with Zeal and true Courage,  
He can scarce get as yet ev'n Salt to his Porridge."

Keimer's successor as printer in Barbados was William Beeby, whose presence is known by the appearance of his imprint on a small book printed in 1741. It was *Some Memoirs of the First Settlement of the Island of Barbados*, "extracted from Antient Records, Papers, and Accounts taken from . . . some of the first Settlers, the last of whom was alive in 1688 aged 82." This had the imprint "Barba-

dos. Printed by Wm. Beeby, 1741." Two copies of this book (the only copies known to me) are to be found in the Library of the British Museum. Beeby's imprint also appeared in 1744 on *Ingram's Essay on the Nature of Dysenteries*, of which no extant copy is known to me. Although there are no surviving issues of those years to give evidence, it seems certain that Beeby also published the *Barbados Gazette* after Keimer gave it up. The only known issue with his name on it, however, is No. 1052, dated May 30th, 1753, found in the British Museum. It is an unpretentious little two-page half-sheet filled entirely with advertising matter except for "The Respectful Address of the People, Called, Quakers, in the said Island" to Henry Grenville, the governor, with the governor's brief reply. At the end is the colophon: "Bridgetown: Printed for W. Beeby, in Broad-Street, near the Custom-House; where Advertisements are taken in, and all Persons may be supplied with this Paper, at 5s. per Quarter." We have still to discover who did the printing "for W. Beeby."

In 1760, William Brown, a protege and former apprentice of William Dunlap, of Philadelphia, was sent to Barbados by Dunlap to manage a printing office at Bridgetown in which Dunlap had an interest. No record remains of any printing done by Brown in Barbados. He left the island in 1763 and went to Quebec, where he became the first printer in Quebec whose name is known.

Before William Brown left Barbados, George Esmand had begun to print there. It must have been in May, 1762, that he started the *Barbados Mercury*. The earliest recorded issue of this paper is volume 4, number 35, February 1, 1766, preserved in the library of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. It was issued "by George Esmand and Comp. at the new Printing-



Office in back Church-Street" in Bridgetown. In addition to the volume number, it bore the notation "No. 194 (Weeks since this Mercury was first published)." This number determines May 22, 1762, as the date of the first issue. An error in statement on pages 124 and 125 of Robert H. Schomburgk's *History of Barbados* has been responsible for dating the beginning of the *Mercury* in 1733—a date which is clearly impossible for the paper which George Esmand published.

In 1766 the imprint of G. Esmand and Comp. appeared on two pamphlets containing replies to John Dickinson's *Address to the Committee of Correspondence in Barbados*, and *A Letter to the North American*, which have both been found in the Library of Congress at Washington.

In 1767 and 1768 the imprint of G. Esmand and W. Walker appeared on John Singleton's *A General Description of the West-Indian Islands*, "attempted in blank verse," and on *Remarks upon a Book entitled A Short History of Barbados . . . to the End of the Year 1767 by George Frere*. Esmand died in 1771 and Walker in 1773, but not before the *Barbados Mercury* had been so firmly established that it lived for nearly a century.

The name of John Orderson is that of the next printer to appear in the Barbados record. A portion of another issue of the *Barbados Mercury*, also preserved in the library of the American Antiquarian Society, shows that the issue of September 2, 1775, was "printed by John Orderson and Co. at the New-Printing-Office, in Bridgetown." This issue bears the notation "694 weeks since this Mercury was first published." This number also is reckoned from May 22, 1762, as the date of beginning.

John Orderson & Son put their name on at least one of the acts of the Barbados assembly in 1784, as is known

from a copy of it in the Public Record Office, London.

The next name we find is that of Thomas Wilmott Perch, whose imprint appeared in 1789 on a small booklet entitled *Letters of Philo-Xylon*. These letters, on the subject of negro slavery in Barbados, were "first published in the Barbados Gazettes, during the years 1787 and 1788." This evidence of the survival to that date of the island's first newspaper is corroborated by the presence, in the Library of Congress copy of the *Letters*, of a broadside headed "Barbados Gazette, September 2, 1789." This broadside contains a single article with the heading "To the Equity and Policy of a Great Nation. Barbados, August 10th."

Finally, toward the close of the eighteenth century, there occurs the imprint of Isaac W. Orderson (possibly the "son" of John Orderson & Son) in 1795, on a 6-page act of the assembly, also found in the Public Record Office. Of other printing by the two Ordersons or by Perch I have as yet found no trace.

In fact, the record of the earliest printers in Barbados remains very fragmentary and the surviving specimens of their work are very scanty. Since Schomburgk's *History* in 1848, in which four pages are given to the press of Barbados, no historian seems to have attempted even a brief account of Barbados printing.

For some of the details of the present paper I am indebted to a letter received some four years ago from Mr. E. Maxwell Shilstone, of Bridgetown.